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AUTHOR Gooding, C. Thomas
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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to identify classroom teacher views of national achievement testing, and to examine potential implications for classroom practice and faculty professional development, 124 teachers in Great Britain were surveyed. Data gathered from the survey indicated: (1) 65% of the teachers were generally opposed to national achievement testing in the schools; (2) 60% said that if national achievement testing were put into practice, they would prefer utilizing criterion referenced evaluation rather than norm referenced tests; (3) two-thirds indicated that they would increase their direct test review time; (4) 50% believed that a system of national achievement testing could lead to a more test oriented curriculum; (5) the majority believed that they have not been adequately informed or consulted with respect to the design of the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) test; and (6) 45% reported that they were concerned that the testing of their students could possibly result in a scheme of faculty evaluation which would be based in part on how well their students performed on the national tests. (RL)

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Faculty Development and Current Problems in Accountability in Great Britain

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C. Thomas Gooding
Visiting Professor, School of Education
University of Liverpool, England

Eastern Educational Research Association Convention
Norfolk, Virginia
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Faculty Development and Current Problems
in Accountability in Great Britain

Introduction

Accountability for student learning has been a major issue in education in the United States throughout the decade of the 1970's. Recent developments in Britain indicate that an even stronger movement toward accountability through national standardized testing may now be underway in the United Kingdom.

The focus of this paper is twofold: 1. Recent trends in accountability assessment approaches taking shape in Great Britain are delineated. 2. Potential effects of national standardized achievement testing on teaching practices and on faculty development programs in primary and secondary schools are examined.

It is important to indicate that the term accountability has a variety of definitions (Halpin, 1979). The definitions according to Shapiro (1979) range from those which focus on narrow monetary concern to those having broad political connotations. Performance contracting provides an example of the former while national ability testing is illustrative of the latter.

While few educators object to accountability in principle, it is widely agreed that severe problems arise in moving from principles to the translation of those ideas and ideals concerning accountability into educational practices (Broudy, 1972). Typifying these problems is a recent article by Dixon (1978). He argues that schools must be held strictly accountable for their role in the education of students, and he advocates the invention of sound procedures for assessing the degree to which the schools are achieving their objectives. On the other hand he also asserts in the same article that we have made the mistake in the past of relying on traditional standardized tests as a means of making such accountability assessments as he advocates.

Even so in Great Britain currently, as in the United States, traditional norm referenced standardized tests continue to be the major tool for assessing student achievement (Cox, 1977; Halpin, 1979).

In England at the present time the principal forms of standardized achievement testing in schools throughout the country are the General Certificate of Education (GCE) "O" level and "A" level examinations and the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination (Department of Education and Science, 1978).

The GCE "O" and "A" level examinations are administered at ages 15 and 18 respectively to students enrolled in fifth and sixth forms in the schools. These are college preparatory type examinations in the basic subject matter areas. The CSE examination is a basic examination which is taken for the high school certificate by students who do not plan to attend university.

The GCE and CSE examining boards are separate, regionally based bodies. Both types of boards have government sanction and authority to conduct examinations. In practice these boards enjoy a large degree of autonomy. Problems arise from the overlapping functions. There are concerns on the part of professionals and of lay people over the relative meanings of the two different sets of examinations. There are also problems in the interpretation of scores on these two types of examinations. Further difficulties are presented by this system of parallel boards and examinations, whenever students seek to change their educational objectives during or following their secondary education.

It is in response to problems arising from this dual system of qualifying examinations that the national assessment testing program has been initiated. The goal is to create a system of evaluation on the national level that will provide a clear picture of the performance of individual students and of schools throughout the country.

Problem

In 1974 the Department of Education and Science (DES) in Britain announced the creation of an Assessment of Performance Unit (APU). The APU, aware of recent criticisms of traditional norm reference testing, has embarked upon a program of test development based on a Rasch modelling approach. According to a DES report, "The APU assessments, certainly for mathematics, language, and science will be partly based on item banks designed to reflect a wide range of current classroom practices and levels of difficulty. Each of the items in the bank is tried out in many schools and on the basis of these trials is given an index of difficulty. It will be possible to discuss out-of-date items, or those used in reports to exemplify the tests, year by year, and develop new ones reflecting changes in the curriculum of the schools." (Department of Education and Science, 1978, p.2).

Some observers do not believe that the Rasch modelling approach solves the problems inherent in traditional norm referenced tests (Goldstein, 1979; Stones, 1979). Commenting on the above proposal of the APU, Goldstein states that a Rasch model assumes first of all that there is a single "trait" or "factor" which determines the chance that an individual responds correctly to an item on a test. Goldstein asserts, "If we suppose that each of the items in the bank has a prescribed difficulty value, then it is strictly meaningless within the context of a Rasch model to speak of one item being more applicable to one time than to another." (Goldstein, 1979, p.15).

Stones, a critic of norm referenced testing in the schools, has also raised questions regarding application of the Rasch model as proposed by the APU. He points out, "No matter how high pupils' achievement may be in tests of this nature about half will be considered unsatisfactory, perhaps 'under achieving' since their scores will be 'below average'." (Stones, 1979, p.13). Stones calls for a program

of testing that assesses the achievement or lack of achievement of a predefined and agreed upon set of criterion standards.

Method

In an attempt to identify classroom teacher views of national achievement testing such as proposed by the APU and to examine potential implications for classroom practice and faculty professional development, a small sample of teachers in Great Britain was selected and surveyed regarding the issues noted above.

Two hundred survey forms were distributed to teachers from ten district primary and secondary schools in Central England. One hundred and twenty-four responses were received. The survey instrument queried the teachers concerning their attitudes toward selected issues in testing currently under consideration by the APU.

Results

1. Data gathered from the survey indicates that of the 124 teachers who replied 65% are generally opposed to national achievement testing in the schools. The most frequently cited reason (25% of those opposed) being that such testing is viewed as placing constraints on the teacher in an attempt to insure that classes should not fall below the national average. Some of the teachers remarked that in their view such an approach is detrimental to the work of the schools.

2. Sixty per cent of the teachers surveyed say that if national achievement testing is put into practice, they would prefer to see criterion referenced evaluation utilized rather than norm referenced tests. (32% in favour) If this result is indicative of attitudes of teachers throughout Britain, the traditional normative test is definitely seen by teachers as an undesirable method of national achievement assessment.

3. With regard to the impact of a national achievement testing program on their classroom practice, the survey findings indicate that these teachers are of the opinion that national testing would result in changing their classroom behaviour by increasing their test preparation time. Two thirds of all the teachers sampled indicated that they would increase their direct test review time. Twenty per cent of the teachers say that they already spend at least 10% of their class time directly in preparation for standardized testing, e.g., reviewing old exams in class, having the class take sample exams, studying from exam review books. Fifty percent of the teachers believe that a system of national achievement testing could lead to a more test oriented curriculum.

4. As to the work of the APU and the input to the test development program available to teachers, the majority of those surveyed are of the opinion that they have not been adequately informed or consulted with respect to the design of the testing program. While 82% of the teachers had either done reading on the work of the APU or attended professional meetings where the APU testing development program was discussed, 60% indicated that they believe that they still have little information on the work of the APU.

5. Finally, in open-ended response data gathered in the survey, the teachers often reported (45% of the cases) that they were concerned that the testing of their students could possibly result in a scheme of faculty evaluation which would be based in part on how well their students performed on the national tests.

Discussion

While the DES (1978) reports that pilot programs in schools in England and Wales have involved approximately 12,500 pupils in the mathematics test development project alone, the APU seems remote to most

of the teachers surveyed. The composition of the APU board may suggest a reason for this perception.

The table of organization of the APU Coordinating Group consists of a 17 member Board of Directors. (See Figure 1) Ten of the members are school inspectors (HMI'S) or DES personnel. One is from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). This leaves a total of only six seats on the board for institutional representatives. At present there are one primary school teacher, two secondary school teachers, one college of education representative, and one local school district authority representative (Simon, 1979).

Perhaps increasing teacher and teacher educator representation on the APU board could help to increase the effective level of input of teachers and also provide more communication links between the APU and teachers and their professional organizations. The present makeup of the APU board is such that it is weighted strongly toward the influence of the DES and related governmental bureaus.

In any event, on the basis of the information gathered in this survey, these teachers do not appear to believe that teaching professionals have a major role in the decision making processes regarding national achievement testing in Great Britain.

To recall the findings of the survey relating to the matter of teacher evaluation, the teachers canvassed expressed concern that traditional norm referenced testing is not the best course of action for assessment. They believe that norm referenced national achievement testing will put the emphasis on having their students achieve scores that are above average rather than having them achieve a set standard of competency in subject matter areas. The teachers are concerned also that norm referenced test results will be utilized as a means of assessing their professional performance.

In a recent article on faculty professional development and

teacher assessment Eckhard and McElhinny (1977) pointed out that contemporary teacher evaluation and educational accountability are usually based on three sources of data: classroom observations, supervisor ratings, and pupil scores on standardized tests. Such an evaluation procedure often ignores teaching objectives and places strong emphasis on standardized normative measures which assess content and competencies "that are not the exclusive domain of the school, but are widely available in the culture, and therefore do not exclusively measure instruction." (Eckhard & McElhinny, 1977, p.615). They propose instead an alternative evaluation model based on a 14 step program. Their program relies on a teaching objectives contracting system jointly developed between supervisor and teacher. This procedure employs a criterion referenced approach to the assessment of classroom achievement rather than the traditional norm referenced model of assessment of achievement. Such a model of assessment provides for measurement of progress of both students and teachers based on a growth oriented criterion based plan as contrasted with the more traditional norm referenced competitive plan.

Conclusions

In view of the opinions of the teachers surveyed an approach of the sort suggested by Eckhard and McElhinny seems called for if national achievement testing is implemented in Great Britain. Otherwise, against a background of norm referenced testing which is currently developing in Britain, it will in my view become more difficult to create and sustain positive and growth oriented programs of faculty development.

We have seen in the United States that when standardized normative evaluations of student performance are put into practice there is an emphasis on product evaluation based on those norm referenced criteria

with considerably less attention given to the process components of evaluation. Norm referenced product evaluation of this sort is closely related to summative forms of faculty evaluation. While it is acknowledged that summative evaluation has a place in the total scheme of educational assessment, faculty development programs have been shown to operate positively and constructively where there are ample opportunities for both process and product oriented formative evaluation procedures. (Ekhard & McElhinny, 1977; Scriven, 1967; Stufflebeam, 1971). Formative professional evaluation systems are akin to the criterion referenced, individualized evaluation models proposed by many educators seeking alternatives to traditional norm referenced evaluations.

With the APU embarking upon a program of test development for national assessment that relies so heavily on norm referenced evaluation it is clear that teachers will be under increasing pressure to consistently gravitate toward a focus on preparation of their students for these traditional types of examinations. A major irony in all this is that at a time when Great Britain needs to develop a more innovative core of teaching faculty able to prepare students to live more effectively in a rapidly changing world, the normative oriented approaches to evaluation being considered so seriously by the APU may lead to a more static educational program. In the face of the accumulating evidence it is to be hoped that the APU will modify its course and move in the direction of a criterion referenced model of performance assessment.

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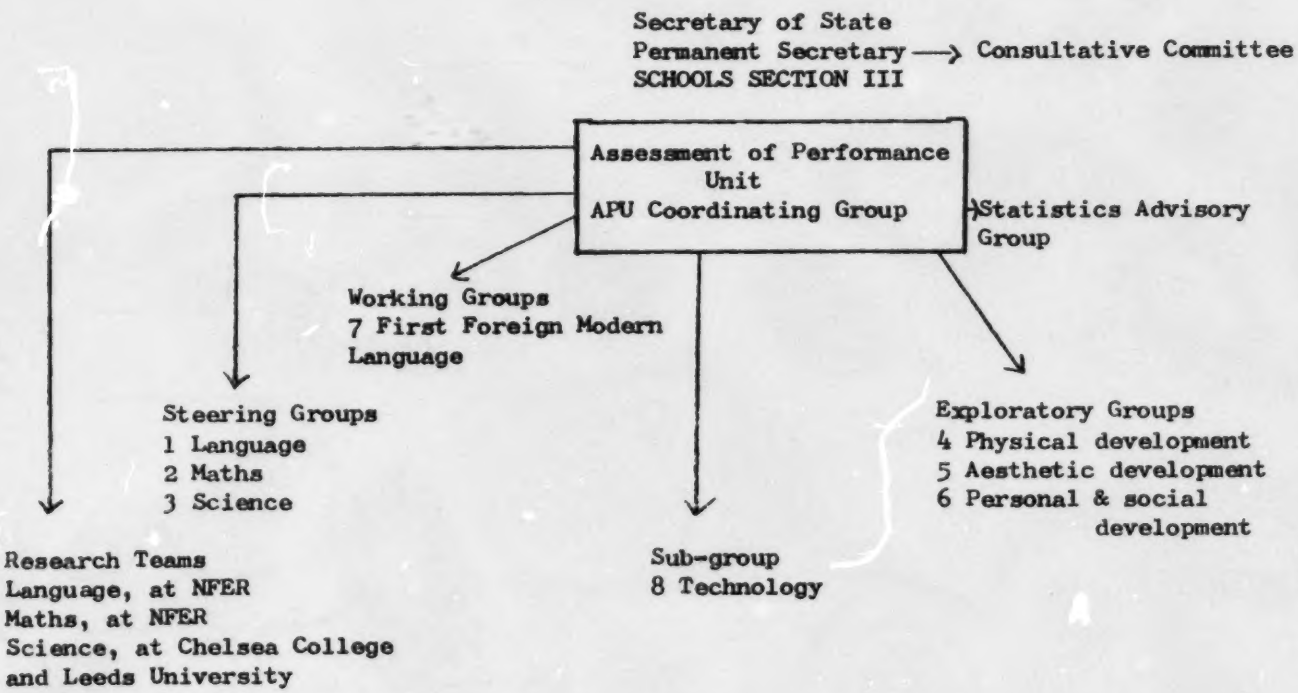
Figure 1

DES Assessment of Performance Unit, May 1979
Components



(Ref: Simon, 1979)

Appendix

Summary of Data

Survey of Teacher Opinions

of Standardized Testing

in the Schools

1. How much information do you presently have concerning the work of the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) of the Department of Education and Science? (Note: The APU has been established to develop a programme of national achievement tests for use in British schools).

Number of Responses	Per cent of Total	
6	5	highly informed
43	35	moderately informed
75	60	have little or no information

2. Tick any applicable items below. Which of the following means have provided you with access to information about the APU test development program?

37	30	I have read documents published by the APU.
42	34	I have read articles about APU in professional journals.
5	4	I have attended meetings on the work of the APU.
30	24	I have had discussions with colleagues.
36	29	I have seen articles in the press or on television.
7	6	other
Totals 102	82	(Minimum of one response)
22	18	(No items marked)

3. How much class time do you spend directly in preparation for standardized testing of your students? (for example, reviewing old examinations, studying exam review books, taking sample tests).

12	10	none
68	55	1% to 9%
25	20	10% to 19%
0	0	20% to 29%
0	0	30% or more
19	15	Not applicable. My students are not presently required to take any standardized tests of achievement.

4. If national achievement tests were to be given to your students, how would this influence the amount of time you would spend in class in preparation for standardized testing?

83	67	increase test review time
41	33	no change
0	0	decrease test review time

5. Do you favor the use of national achievement tests in schools?

8	6	strongly favor
25	20	moderately favor
11	9	neither favor nor oppose
64	52	moderately opposed
16	13	strongly opposed

6. In norm-referenced testing the performance of each individual is compared with that of the total group.

In criterion-referenced testing the performance of each individual is evaluated on the basis of a set standard of competency.

If national achievement tests are to be given would you prefer that they be

40	32	norm-referenced
74	60	criterion referenced
10	8	no preference

7. What do you see as the most important argument in favor of a national achievement testing programme in the schools?

25	20%	Indicator of relative levels of performance among various schools and areas of the country.
20	16%	Device to be used for improvement of national standards of education.

8. What do you see as the most important argument against a national achievement testing programme in the schools?

56	45%	Data could be used in teacher rankings or for ratings of instruction.
32	26%	Curriculum could become more linked to preparation for the national tests.